FD-302 (Rev. 4-15-64)

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

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Date April 26, 1968

Reverend SAMUEL B. KYLES, minister of the Monumental Baptist Church, 741 South Parkway East, who resides at [redacted] Memphis, Tennessee, on interview advised as follows:

Reverend KYLES, who has lived in Memphis for approximately the past eight years, is on the Executive Board of the Memphis, Tennessee, Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and is also a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the national headquarters of which is Atlanta, Georgia, and the President of which, up until April 4, 1968, was Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Reverend KYLES stated that a sanitation workers' strike began in Memphis, Tennessee, February 12, 1968, and that shortly after its start a group of Negro ministers in Memphis, including himself, banded together to form a group which adopted the name of Community on the Move for Equality (COME), raising funds for the sanitation strikers and assisting them in daily marches and other strike-support activity. He stated that as early as March 18, 1968, he, along with some of the other COME leaders, induced Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., to come to Memphis where, on the night of March 18, 1968, he gave an inspiring talk at Mason Temple to approximately 10,000 to 12,000 people, urging the Negro community of Memphis to unite behind the sanitation workers.

KYLES and some of the other COME leaders also induced Dr. KING to return to Memphis on the morning of March 28, 1968, to lead a massive downtown march in support of the sanitation workers.

Considerable breaking of downtown windows and looting resulted during this march, as a result of which KYLES stated the sanitation strike received nationwide publicity, and Dr. KING agreed to return to Memphis, along with other SCLC staff members, in early April, 1968, to continue support on behalf of the sanitation workers.

On 4/23/68 at Memphis, Tennessee File # Memphis 44-1987

S[redacted]

by [redacted] Date dictated 4/25/68

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Reverend KYLES recalled that Dr. KING actually returned to Memphis on Wednesday morning, April 3, 1968, with several of his staff associates including the Vice President of SCLC, Reverend RALPH D. ABERNATHY, and his administrative assistant BERNARD LEE. They all checked into the Lorraine Hotel and Motel, 406 Mulberry Street, Memphis, and actually KYLES had rented rooms for some of the SCLC staff members under his name. He pointed out that actually he was registered in Room 312 of the Lorraine Motel as of April 3, 1968, although he did not physically occupy this room and did not now recall the exact SCLC individual who occupied Room 312. He recalled that Dr. KING occupied Room 306, as did Reverend RALPH D. ABERNATHY.

He recalled that Dr. KING and his staff remained in Memphis on the night of April 3, 1968, and also remained in Memphis on April 4, 1968. In addition, he pointed out that there had been widespread publicity in not only the Memphis news media, including the two daily white newspapers, but also on virtually all of the radio and television stations concerning the presence of Dr. KING and his staff in Memphis and of the fact that they were staying at the Lorraine Motel. He stated he could not recall the specific radio broadcast but there was at least one broadcast, possibly more, which even gave the room number, namely Room 306, in which Dr. KING was staying in Memphis, and that this information was readily available to anyone who tended to read the newspaper or took the time to listen to the radio news broadcasts. In other words, he said it was no secret as to where Dr. KING was staying.

Reverend KYLES recalled that he personally went to the Lorraine Motel at approximately 2:30 p.m. on April 4, 1968, and recalled that the Operation Breadbasket band, a singing group of the SCLC, was rehearsing in one of the rooms in the motel, this group being led by BEN BRANCH, a former music teacher of Memphis, Tennessee. KYLES joined this group and they all sang various hymns and SCLC songs until approximately 5 p.m. At this point, Reverend KYLES went to Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel to visit with Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., and Reverend RALPH D. ABERNATHY. He pointed out that he had earlier invited Dr. KING and Reverend ABERNATHY to his home [redacted] for a "soul dinner" on the evening of April 4, 1968, pointing out

that Dr. KING and Reverend ABERNATHY both savored "soul food," which would normally consist of neck bones, chitterlings, turnip greens and black-eyed peas, and that his wife had consented to cook such a dinner for Dr. KING and his group. He pointed out that both KING and ABERNATHY had been reminded by him earlier that dinner was to be at approximately 6 p.m.

He recalled that during the approximate period from 5:30 p.m. to 5:55 p.m., April 4, 1968, that Dr. KING, Reverend ABERNATHY and Reverend KYLES sat and talked in Room 306 as Dr. KING and ABERNATHY dressed in preparation for the dinner appointment. At a time estimated by KYLES as being 5:55 p.m., or thereabouts, Dr. KING walked out of Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel, the door of which faces west and overlooks a swimming pool and parking area onto Mulberry Street, which is a narrow north-south street in Memphis. Dr. KING's room, 306, was on the second floor and as one walks out of the room there is a balcony and walkway area, the balcony having an iron rail approximately three feet high to keep one from falling off the balcony. Dr. KING, KYLES recalled, stood on the balcony and was speaking with various people standing in the parking area of the motel directly beneath him. One of the persons with whom Dr. KING was speaking was Reverend JESSE JACKSON, an SCLC staff member from Chicago, Illinois. KYLES recalled leaving Room 306 and going out and talking with Dr. KING, telling him not to bring too many people to his house or there would not be enough food to satisfy all of them. KYLES also recalled that SOLOMON JONES, a local Negro who works for one of the funeral homes, had been Dr. KING's chauffeur while in Memphis and that KING may have made some comment to JONES about getting the car ready for their trip to the KYLES residence.

Reverend KYLES also recalled that at about this period of time Reverend ABERNATHY had applied shaving cream to his face preparing to take a quick shave before departing to dinner and that KYLES and KING were standing side by side on the balcony and he also recalled that KING spoke to CHAUNCEY EASKRIDGE who is an attorney for SCLC and who was in Memphis with the SCLC staff.

Others recalled by KYLES being on the ground level within viewing and listening distance of Dr. KING were Reverend JAMES L. BEVEL, also of the SCLC staff and who has recently been living in Chicago, and several young Negroes, names not recalled, who had been hanging around and supporting the sanitation workers strike. He pointed out that he would put these folks in the category of "hero worshipers" who liked to be around KING and other important personages.

At this point, KYLES estimated the time as being approximately 6 o'clock p.m., and stated that he, KYLES, started to walk north on the balcony walkway toward the old Lorraine Hotel portion of the establishment for the purpose of getting his car, which was parked on the parking lot. He recalled looking down and saying something to CHAUNCEY ESKRIDGE who was standing on the ground and estimated that he had walked approximately four door lengths north of Room 306 when he, KYLES, heard a loud but possibly muffled sound. At first he thought it was a noise from the immediate area possibly caused by the backfiring of an automobile or possibly even a loud firecracker which had exploded in the immediate vicinity.

He was next conscious of seeing Reverend JAMES L. BEVEL who had been standing on the ground north of Room 306 running to the motel area ostensibly for cover and recalled some unknown individual yelling in a loud voice, "They've shot MARTIN!" At this point he turned around and looked back south toward the entrance of Room 306 and was next conscious of seeing Dr. KING's prone body. KING was resting on the balcony floor with his back to the floor, his face facing upward, his feet partially protruding through the grill work of the iron railway, and his head headed in a southeasterly direction toward the passageway just south of Room 306.

KYLES continued that he took a quick glance at KING's prone body after reaching same and saw a gaping hole in what he recalled to be the right side of KING's face in the area of his cheek bone and protruding downward into his neck area. He stated that he was not familiar with guns or gun wounds but he subconsciously realized that the

noise which he had heard had undoubtedly been that of a gunshot which had wounded Dr. KING. He pointed out that KING's eyes appeared to be open and that he personally felt KING may still have been alive. He was not conscious of anyone else near KING's body at this time and pointed out that he went into a state of shock and ran rather hysterically into Room 306 where he attempted to use a telephone for the purpose of calling an ambulance. In the meantime, ABERNATHY had run out of Room 306 with shaving cream still on his face in an effort to see what had happened to Dr. KING. KYLES pointed out that in his confusion he was unable to pick up the phone properly to call the motel switchboard to ask for an ambulance and recalled ABERNATHY running back into the room and telling him to settle down and gain his composure as everything would be all right.

KYLES came back out of the room to the vicinity of KING's body and was next conscious of seeing several uniformed Memphis Police officers running on foot toward the vicinity of KING's body and recalled some of them yelling, "What happened?" He stated that he recalled yelling at some of the police officers to call an ambulance. He was next conscious of Reverend ABERNATHY leaning over KING's prone body attempting to talk with KING or to get some response from him and could recall hearing ABERNATHY say, "MARTIN, can you hear me?"

Reverend KYLES recalled running into Room 306 and grabbing up a bedspread off one of the beds which he brought out to use to cover KING's body. He recalled that a white male employee of the United States Justice Department, name not recalled, who had been staying at the motel brought a towel which someone held over the large gaping wound on the right side of KING's face.

Within a few moments an ambulance arrived to take KING's body to a hospital and he recalled that a JOSEPH LOUW, an African who is a photographer and who was staying at the motel, took some pictures in the immediate vicinity and that many of the people who by this time had come to the balcony seemed to point toward the west side of Mulberry where there is a thicket of bushes and empty land bordered further on the west by the back side of some old two-story brick buildings which face on Main Street and indicated in

their pointing and comments that the shot probably came from that general direction. In other words, the shot came from the west toward the east.

Thereafter, according to Reverend KYLES, an ambulance crew took Dr. KING's body to the St. Joseph Hospital.

Reverend KYLES looked at a series of photographs which appeared in "Life Magazine," issue of April 12, 1968, some of which were taken immediately after the shooting of Dr. KING and prior to the arrival of the ambulance and which depict Dr. KING's prone body lying face up on the concrete walkway on the second floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel and taken by Photographer JOSEPH LOUW. He stated that the only people that he could identify by name in the early photographs prior to the arrival of the ambulance were Reverend ANDREW YOUNG of the SCLC staff and some local unidentified Negroes who were apparently assisting in an effort to render immediate first aid to Dr. KING. Reverend KYLES pointed out that these photographs must have been taken almost immediately following the shooting of Dr. KING because they do not show the bedspread over KING's body.

He stated that very few people actually were cognizant of the fact that Dr. KING was to be a dinner guest at his home on the evening of April 4, 1968; that among the guests who had been invited to his recollection were Dr. KING, his brother, Reverend A. D. WILLIAMS KING, and two of the latter's companions, Mrs. LUKIE WARD and Mrs. GEORGIA M. DAVIS, both of Louisville, Kentucky; and that Reverend ABERNATHY was to have been there, as was CHAUNCEY ESKRIDGE. He stated that Reverend ANDREW YOUNG and HOSEA WILLIAMS, both of the SCLC staff, were also to be his dinner guests on that evening.

He stated that to his recollection there had been no publicity concerning the fact that KING and his small party were to be his dinner guests and that it appeared to be a mere coincidence that Dr. KING walked out in front of the doorway of Room 306 and stood there some four to five minutes prior to the time that he was shot.

Reverend KYLES stated that he had searched his memory during the intervening time subsequent to Dr. KING's being shot and that at no time could he recall seeing anyone to the west or northwest from which direction he is now convinced the shot came. He saw no one looking out any of the windows in the buildings facing Main Street, the rear entrances of which would have faced the Motel; and he saw no one on the ground below.

He stated that he talked with CHAUNCEY ESKRIDGE shortly after the shooting and that ESKRIDGE who was on the ground level in the parking area in front of the Motel stated that after the shot he, ESKRIDGE, had run west from the Motel to the middle of Mulberry Street but that he did not see anyone with any firearm either on the ground or in any of the buildings. Reverend KYLES recalled that SOLOMON JONES has been reported to have stated that he saw someone possibly with a white headpiece in the ground area just west of the west side of Mulberry Street behind the bushes and possibly saw someone drop something in that area.

Reverend KYLES stated that in fairness to JONES, JONES could not have seen the ground area which he had originally described because of the fact that there is a brick retaining wall which surrounds the swimming pool and that JONES would have been behind this wall when KING was shot and could not have seen behind the bushes on the west side of Mulberry Street as this wall is about eight feet tall.

Reverend KYLES concluded that none of his acquaintances in the SCLC or other acquaintances in Memphis who have been close to the Negro movement can recall anything concerning any suspicious movements in the vicinity of the Lorraine Motel immediately preceding or during the time that Dr. KING was shot.